

SAMPLE OP-ED
(1,075 words)



Parents Who Host Lose the Most®

If You're Hosting a Party for Your Teens This Summer, Keep it Alcohol-Free

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for 15-to-20-year-olds in America. In fact, young drivers between 15 and 20 years old, account for less than seven percent of America's licensed drivers, yet are responsible for just over 20 percent of the nation's annual traffic crash fatalities.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), 7,884 drivers, ages 15-20 years old, were involved in fatal traffic crashes across the nation in 2003 – killing a total of 8,666 persons and injuring over 300,000 more.

Just as concerning, young drivers between the ages of 15 and 20 are more often involved in alcohol-related crashes than any comparable age group.

While all states and the District of Columbia have 21-year old minimum drinking age laws, more than 20 percent of young people below the legal drinking age reported driving under the influence of alcohol, other drugs, or both, in the past year, according to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health.

In fact, nearly a third (31 percent) of the 15-20-year-old drivers who were killed in fatal crashes in 2003 had been drinking. Twenty-five percent of the drivers had a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) level of 0.08 percent and above.

The fatality rate in these crashes is compounded because young drivers and their passengers are much less likely to wear their safety belts after drinking. Sixty-five percent of 15-20-year-old drivers killed in all fatal crashes in 2003 were unrestrained. But 74 percent of the young drivers killed after drinking were not buckled up.

Where are these underage teens gaining access to so much alcohol? What they report may be surprising.

A recent survey commissioned by The Century Council, a national non-profit dedicated to fighting drunk driving and underage drinking, revealed that 65 percent of underage youth say they get alcohol from family and friends, meaning they get it from their parents, their friends' parents, older siblings or friends, with or without their permission.

- more -

Most troubling, some parents have become willing accomplices in planning teen parties and turning a blind eye to alcohol use in their own homes. Between graduation parties, end-of-school celebrations and the free-time and fun of the summer season, parents can be tempted to host parties for their minor-aged kids and their friends – sometimes with alcohol – with the mistaken belief that it is a safer option for their kids to drink at home than to drink somewhere else.

Other parents may regard high school graduation – or going off to college – as normal rites of passage or special occasions where it is fine for alcohol to be served. Others think back to their teens when the legal drinking age in many states was 18 and consider alcohol use just a normal part of growing up.

But the legal drinking age in America is now 21. Underage drinking is illegal in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

That's why **[Local Organization]** is joining with other federal, state and local highway safety and law enforcement officials across the nation to remind all parents – *Parents Who Host Lose the Most*. If your underage teen drinks and drives, you may be legally liable for any damage, injury or death caused by your child. This is especially true if you provided the alcohol.

The consumption or possession of alcohol provided by you is all the evidence needed for you to be criminally prosecuted or civilly sued.

Specific laws vary state by state, but parents who break these laws could be forced to pay all medical bills and property damages in the case of a crash, and could also be sued for emotional pain and suffering when there is severe injury or death.

In some states, the parents can even subject themselves to criminal prosecution. In one case in Pennsylvania, a parent was sentenced to a 1 to 4 year prison term for involuntary manslaughter after three teens died in a drunk-driving crash following a party the parent hosted. In that case, the parent did not buy the alcohol consumed at the party, but knowingly permitted the teens to drink the alcohol that was brought in by others.

– more –

Don't Be a Party to Teenage Drinking

Just a few helpful steps can help parents avoid disaster. If you are planning a party for your teen in your home this summer:

- Help make the guest list and limit the number to be invited. Send personal invitations to avoid the dangers of "open parties."
- Put your phone number on the invitation and encourage calls from other parents to check on the event. Think about inviting some of the other parents to help during the party and to help you supervise to ensure no alcohol or drugs are present, and to help ask uninvited attendees to leave.
- At the party, limit access to a specified area of your property. Make sure there is plenty of food and soft drinks available. Make regular, unannounced visits to the party area throughout the evening.
- If your teen is attending a party at someone else's home, call the parent to verify the details and to ensure there will be adult supervision and no alcohol served.
- Know how your teen is getting to and from the party. And be aware when your teen arrives home. Seeing and kissing your child good night is one way to detect if alcohol or drugs were used.
- If you are going away for the weekend or on vacation and plan on leaving your teen home alone, be direct and set clear expectations, ground rules and consequences if you think your teen might be tempted to host a party. Notify your neighbors and ask them to keep an eye out – and leave the phone numbers that should be called in the event of a problem or an emergency.

Talk to your kids and make sure they know you are concerned for their safety and do not condone underage alcohol or drug use or their use of a motor vehicle after any use of alcohol or drugs.

But most importantly, as responsible parents, don't be a party to teenage drinking.

If you are hosting a party for your teen this summer, keep it alcohol-free. Remember *Parents Who Host Lose the Most*. Any adult who serves alcohol to underage youth, or who is aware of it being served to underage youth on their property, may be legally responsible and liable for all of the destructive and deadly damage that results.

###